Testimony of Paige MacLean Achievement First Testimony submitted to the Education Committee March 13, 2013

Chairpersons Stillman and Fleischmann and esteemed members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this afternoon. My name is Paige MacLean and I am here to testify in support of H.B. 6222, an Act Concerning District Partnerships. As Achievement First's Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships, one of my primary responsibilities is to work with our host districts of Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven to establish partnerships that work to improve outcomes for all students in those cities.

Following the establishment of the pilot district partnership legislation, Achievement First and Hartford Public Schools entered into an MOU whereby the district agreed to provide Achievement First Hartford Academy free facilities with custodial and maintenance services and per pupil operating support in exchange for a commitment from Achievement First Hartford Academy to provide an excellent education to families from Hartford's North End, one of the most historically underserved sections of the city. The financial and other support that Hartford Public Schools is providing to Achievement First has been especially vital in light of the disparity between the per pupil funding and facilities supports available for students who attend our state's public charter schools and those who attend other public schools.

Through our affiliation with Hartford Public Schools, AF Hartford Academy is included in Hartford Public Schools' district portfolio, meaning that students enroll for the school through the district's school choice lottery. Last year, AF Hartford Academy Elementary was the #1 school selected by Hartford families for kindergarten in the Hartford Public Schools District Choice Lottery. In addition, Achievement First Hartford students are making dramatic academic gains. In some grades and subjects, student performance at Achievement First Hartford Academy has now surpassed the gap-closing standards of

the highest-performing and most affluent suburban districts. For example, our eighth graders achieved 92 percent proficiency in reading and 91 percent proficiency in writing on the 2012 Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT), outperforming their peers in nearby West Hartford, one of the state's most affluent communities.

The partnership that we have developed with Hartford Public Schools has created the environment for an ongoing cross-fertilization of ideas and practices between our organizations to ensure that the best ideas, wherever they are developed, can help **all** of Hartford's children on their climb to college.

Highlights of this partnership include:

- Receiving a \$5 million grant through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation District Charter Compact
 initiative to allow Hartford Public Schools, Jumoke Academy and Achievement First to promote the
 sharing of best practices around leadership development, implementation of the Common Core
 State Standards and teacher evaluation. (This three-year grant was the largest of only seven given
 across the country.);
- The training and development of a corps of future Hartford Public School district leaders through participation in Achievement First's Residency Program for School Leadership; and
- The creation of more high-quality seats for Hartford students through the opening of AF Hartford
 High School in August 2012. This high school, which also serves students from Jumoke Academy
 middle schools, allowed AF to fulfill our promise to our Hartford families of being with them to
 continue the climb to and through college.

We believe that much of this crucially important partnership work would not have been possible without the pilot Act Concerning District Partnerships. We strongly urge you to support H.B. 6222 to make possible more permanent partnerships like the one we and the Hartford Public Schools have cultivated.